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SUBJECT: SOMALIA: SENIOR DJIBOUTI OFFICIAL ON YUSUF'S
FUTURE

Classified By: Amb. James Swan for Reasons 1.5 (b)(d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Ismail Tani, Djibouti's point person on Somalia issues, says the GODJ has rebuffed Transitional Federal Government (TFG) President Yusuf's repeated and continuing appeals to travel to Djibouti to participate in the next round of talks with the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (ARS). While noting the growing consensus that it is time for Yusuf to go, the GODJ (and President Guelleh personally, according to Tani) fears that Yusuf will resort to divisive clan politics to torpedo reconciliation if he is forced out against his will. Guelleh instead favors "stroking" Yusuf to persuade him to leave on his own, perhaps in exchange for naming his own successor from among the Darod clan. In order to make such an appeal to Yusuf, Tani said Guelleh is considering whether to allow Yusuf into Djibouti -- but keeping him sidelined from the TFG/ARS talks, and seeking to isolate him from other Somali political actors in Nairobi, Baidoa, and Mogadishu. End Summary.

¶2. (C) President Ismail Omar Guelleh's point person on Somalia confirmed Nov. 23 that TFG President Yusuf continues to press for an invitation to Djibouti. GODJ Presidency Secretary General Ismail Tani told the Ambassador that Yusuf is "at the end" and has repeatedly called to ask to travel to Djibouti for this week's planned continuation of TFG/ARS talks. Tani said he had rebuffed Yusuf, explaining that the TFG/ARS talks are organized by UN SRSF Ahmadou Ould-Abdallah not by the GODJ. Based on guidance from the Somalia Unit, Ambassador confirmed that the USG shares Ould-Abdallah's conviction that Yusuf should not come to Djibouti. Tani agreed it would be disruptive at a delicate time in the TFG-ARS negotiations.

¶3. (C) Tani said Yusuf's calls have included increasingly confrontational references to Somali clans. Yusuf accused Tani and the GODJ of backing the "Hawiye," and asking petulantly why the GODJ wasn't satisfied with a Hawiye Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister and also wanted a Hawiye president too. Tani commented this direct reference to clan politics was unseemly for someone who ostensibly is president of all Somalis.

¶4. (C) While there is a growing consensus on the need to replace Yusuf, Tani said, the GODJ worried that , Yusuf would "tribalize" the political dispute and further complicate national reconciliation, if forced out against his will. President Guelleh believes that Yusuf must now be "stroked" to agree to exit of his own volition. Tani suggested Yusuf could agree to leave if Guelleh and others not only appealed to him to consider his place in history, but also (more importantly) allowed Yusuf to name a Darod figure to succeed

him. With this in mind, Tani said Guelleh is considering allowing Yusuf into Djibouti but keeping him isolated from the TFG/ARS talks as well as other Somali political actors in Baidoa, Mogadishu, and Nairobi. Tani said he would discuss next steps with Guelleh after the President's expected return later today (Nov. 23) from a short visit to Dubai. Ambassador reiterated that allowing Yusuf into Djibouti while the TFG remains internally divided over his role would risk transferring this internal squabble to Djibouti and undermining the credibility of the TFG's negotiators in the talks with the ARS.

15. (C) Comment: Tani is among the three or four most influential figures in the Djiboutian government and is widely acknowledged to have the lead -- after President Guelleh -- on the Somalia account. His comments indicate that the GODJ believes it is now a matter of "how" not "whether" Yusuf should go. Tani expressed interest in meeting with Somalia Special Envoy Yates while he is in Djibouti for the TFG/ARS talks and we will work to arrange this.
SWAN